

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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NATO PASS AMB MCCLOSKEY

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, NL, US

SUBJ: US ELECTIONS AS SEEN IN THE NETHERLANDS

1. SUMMARY: THE ELECTION OF JIMMY CARTER HAS BEEN WELCOMED IN THE NETHERLANDS WITH A MIXTURE OF SURPRISE AND SOME UNEASE. WHILE THERE CLEARLY IS NO OPPOSITION TO CARTER AMONG THE NUMEROUS AMERICA WATCHERS, IT IS PRETTY EVIDENT THAT, IF DUTCHMEN HAD VOTED, THEY WOULD HAVE SHOWN A SUBSTANTIAL PREFERENCE FOR PRESIDENT FORD. THERE IS RELIEF THAT THE US ONCE AGAIN WILL HAVE AN ELECTED PRESIDENT. THE DUTCH ARE NOW SETTLING BACK, PREPARED TO KEEP A CAUTIOUS EYE ON THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AS IT TAKES SHAPE IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE US ELECTIONS TURNED OUT TO BE OF INTEREST TO A WIDE CROSS SECTION OF THE DUTCH POPULATION. TIME AND AGAIN EMBASSY OFFICERS ENCOUNTERED EVIDENCE OF DEEP INTEREST IN THE FORD-
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CARTER RACE, BASED ON AN INSTINCTIVE AND ACUTE FEELING THAT THE

RESULTS MATTERED ALSO IN THE NETHERLANDS. TRIGGERED PERHAPS IN PART BY THE CELEBRATION OF THE BICENTENNIAL, THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA HAVE KEPT THE US WELL IN FOCUS IN RECENT MONTHS. PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE ELECTION RAN HIGH. AT HOLLANDS OLDEST UNIVERSITY, LEIDEN, AN "AMERICAN ELECTION NIGHT" SAW SEVERAL THOUSAND STUDENT CRAMMED INTO A BUILDING TO LISTEN TO A PANEL OF DUTCH EXPERTS DISCUSS THE AMERICAN ELECTIONS. THE EVENT TOOK PLACE IN A SETTING RESEMBLING A TYPICAL US ELECTION HEADQUARTERS WITH PARTY BUTTONS, BALOT BOXES AND GAILY DECORATED WITH LARGE AMERICAN FLAGS. AT GRONINGEN ON THE NIGHT OF NOV 3, AN OVERFLOW AUDIENCE PARTICIPATED IN A PANEL DISCUSSION WITH FORMER EC COMMISSION PRESIDENT MANSHOLT, FORMER FOREIGN MIN SCHMELZER AND THE DEAN OF DUTCH COMMENTATORS, JEROME HELDRING, ABOUT THE FUTURE COURSE FOR AMERICA UNDER A CARTER ADMINISTRATION. IN THE EMBASSY AUDITORIUM THAT MORNING, THERE WAS WIED EINTEREST ON THE PART OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER EMBASSIES (INCLUDING THE USSR AND ROMANIA), PRESS AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO DROPPED IN TO WATCH THE TV COVERAGE AND TO SEE RESULTS POSTED ON LARGE BOARDS. FROM ALL THESE MANIFESTATIONS IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE AMERICAN CONNECTION CONTINUES TO MATTER.

3. PREFERNCE THOUGHOUT THE COUNTRY RAN STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF PRESIDENT FORD. MOST OF DUTCH NEVER FOUND A SATISFACTORY ANSWER TO THE QUESTION "JIMMY WHO?". AMONG A DUTCH BODY POLITICA SEVERELY BUFFETED FOR THE PAST YEARS BY THE SHOCKS OF VIET NAME AND WATERGATE -- AND NOT HAVEING QUITE FORGOTTEN THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY--THERE WAS A TENDENCY TO DRAW BACK IN THE FACE OF THE UNKNOWN AND A MATCHING DISPOSTION TO STICK WITH THE TRIED AND TRUE. A STRAW VOTE AT LEIDEN UNIVERSITY RESULTED IN A 5 TO 1 ADVANTAGE FOR FORD. AT GRONINGEN IN A MORE RADICAL UNIVERSITY ATMOSPHERE MATTERS WERE PROBABLY MORE EVEN. BASICALLY THE INSTINCTIVE CAUTION OF THE DUTCH LED THEM TO PREFER FORD OVER CARTER.

4. NONETHELESS CARTER HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE INTEREST, MOSTLY FRIENDLY. HIS YOUTH AND HIS COMMITMENT TO CAUSES WITH WHICH MANY DUTCH AN IDENTIFY--HELP FOR THE POOR AND AID TO THE LDCS--FOUND A RESPONSIVE ECHO. THERE WAS ALSO ADMIRATION FOR HIS DOGGEDNESS AND DETERMINATION AND FOR BEING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHAT WAS REGARDED AS A MAN OF PRINCIPLES. SOME THINGS ABOUT CARTER WERE NOT WELL UNDERSTOOD. HIS "PLAYBOY" INTERVIEW RAISED MANY EYEBROWS. HIS OUTSPOKEN EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS DID NOT SIT WELL, PARTICULARLY AMONG SUPPORTERS OF THE CHRISTIAN PARTIES. HIS COMMENTS ABOUT YUGOSLAVIA WERE REGARDED AS A SERIOUS MISTAKES AND RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ATTITUDE OF A CARTER ADMINISTRATION TOWARDS EUROPE. ON EVENING OF NOV 3 FONMIN VAN DER STOEL REMINDED REPORTERS ON

TV THAT DURING THE CAMPAIGN CARTER HAD STRESSED CLOSER RELATIONS WITH WESTERN EUROPE. VAN DER STOEL ALSO VOICED THE EXPECTATION OF A HEAVIER US ACCENT ON THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. SOCIALIST MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT COMMENTED THAT WASHINGTON MIGHT NOW BE GETTING READY TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE RELAXED ABOUT COMMUNISM IN WESTERN EUROPE.

5. NOW THAT THE RESULTS ARE KNOWN, DUTCH POLITICIANS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE LOOKING AHEAD, WONDERING WHAT THE ADMINISTRATION WILL BE LIKE. MANY OF THESE WILL IN DUE COURSE BE DEALING WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND TO THEM THE QUESTION IS VERY MUCH A LIVE ONE. THE MORNING FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS OUR PARLIAMENTARY CONTACTS, WHILE CONTINUING TO EXPRESS UNCERTAINTY ABOUT CARTER, NEVERTHELESS SEEMED TO WANT TO GIVE HIM EVERY BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT, AND WE GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY WERE MOTIVATED BY A SENSE OF CURIOSITY MIXED WITH ANTICIPATION. CLEARLY THE MOVES OF THE NEW CARTER ADMINISTRATION AS IT TAKES SHAPE WILL BE VERY CLOSELY WATCHED, AND THE DUTCH BODY POLITIC WILL REMAIN HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO INDICATIONS THAT US POLICIES WILL CONTINUE TO ATTACH PRIMARY IMPORTANCE TO RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN ALIES.

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